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ABSTRACT

Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) works with 10 American-affiliated Pacific entities: American Samoa, the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, Yap), Guam, Hawaii, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. The main purpose of this survey was to raise awareness of the risk factors affecting educators in the Pacific entities and to provide insight necessary to redress the concerns of students, policymakers, and educators around the region. The study identified risk factors affecting educators in the Pohnpei State and other Pacific entities served by PREL. These risk factors might also play a role in teachers' and school administrators' absenteeism, attrition and stress burnout. In Pohnpei State, 179 teachers and 30 administrators returned surveys. Absenteeism among teachers and administrators is a problem. Personal illness, vacations, and funerals were cited as leading reasons for being absent. The data collected in the study reveal the extent of these problems and shed some light on possible contributing factors. Appendixes contain teacher and administrator questionnaires. (Contains 17 references.) (DFR)

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Retention and Attrition of Pacific School Teachers and Administrators (RAPSTA) Study

Pohnpei State, Federated States of Micronesia

Research and Development Cadre

July 1998

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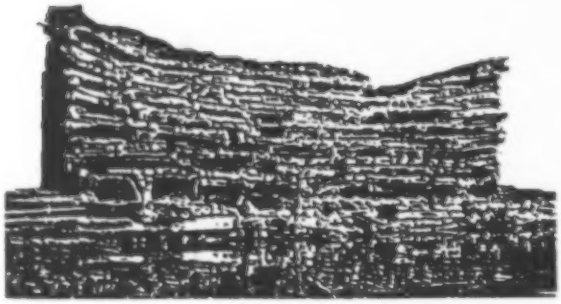

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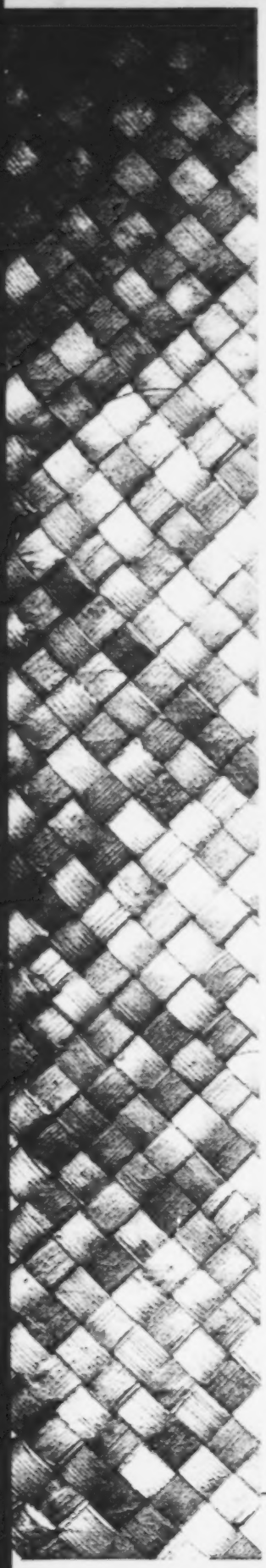

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Preface

This study represents one step towards solving problems that plague many schools throughout the Pacific: high rates of absenteeism, attrition, and stress/burnout among teachers and school administrators. The data collected in this study reveal the extent of these problems and shed some light on possible contributing factors.

During coming months, R&D Cadre members will present this report to teachers and school administrators in each Pacific entity, soliciting feedback and suggestions that we anticipate will lead to the formulation of specific, entity-based solutions to these concerns.

I. Introduction

The mission of Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) is to *assist education, government, community agencies, businesses, and labor groups to maintain cultural literacy and improve the quality of life by helping to strengthen educational programs and processes for children, youth, and adults* (Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, 1996).

In order to carry out this mission, PREL has made a commitment to work in close partnership with the ten American-affiliated Pacific entities: American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, Yap), Guam, Hawai'i, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. As a result of their very different forms of political affiliation with the United States, these ten states are referred to as entities in PREL's terminology.

As part of this work, PREL's Research and Development (R&D) Cadre has undertaken several studies in order to describe the educational experiences and opportunities of Pacific Islanders. The R&D Cadre is a group of Pacific educators consisting of one member from each department or ministry of education in the ten entities comprising PREL's service region, and one member representing the National Department of Education, Federated States of Micronesia.

Each entity has formed a local support team of researchers who assist the cadre member in carrying out research studies. The local R&D support teams range in size from five to thirteen members.

One of the studies conducted, *A Study of Risk Factors Among High School Students in the Pacific Region* (Pacific Region Educational Laboratory R&D Cadre, 1995), sparked interest in examining risk factors associated with adults working in Pacific schools. Open-ended questions answered by students participating in the 1995 study indicated that these students were concerned about teacher absenteeism. In entities where no substitute teacher pool is available, students' educational opportunities may be seriously compromised due to high rates of teacher absenteeism.

Frequent teacher absenteeism in the Pacific may have a strong impact on student achievement. For various reasons, such as lack of funds or human resources, substitute-teacher programs are lacking in many entities. Students might come to school, but a teacher might not be available to teach them. Not only does this affect access to educational opportunities and contribute to low student achievement, it could also have an effect on attendance counts, which can adversely affect school funding, thus perpetuating a negative cycle.

Factors related to teacher and school administrator absenteeism have been identified in the research literature. However, research on this topic is lacking for the Pacific region. As a result, the PREL Board of Directors recommended follow-up research detailing risk factors for teachers and school administrators. This recommendation was supported by the R&D Cadre members, who expressed interest in examining these risk factors within their respective entities. In addition, policy makers and program managers in the ten entities have expressed concern about the impact of teacher and administrator absenteeism, as well as attrition and stress/burnout, on student achievement.

In response to these concerns, a study was designed to describe the factors that affect Pacific Island educators and make them "at risk" for absenteeism, attrition, and stress/burnout. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1997) defines stress as "a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily and mental tension." Research indicates that excessive stress might cause illness.

A condition termed "burnout" (DeRobbio, 1995) could also result from difficult and stressful work conditions. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines this condition as "exhaustion of physical or emotional strength."

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) What are the risk factors that affect Pacific school teachers and administrators?

2) What risk factors lead to absenteeism, attrition, and stress/burnout?

Issues of particular interest to Pohnpei State are high rates of teacher absenteeism and attrition, and stress and burnout among teachers and school administrators.

This study was designed to identify risk factors affecting educators in Pohnpei State and other Pacific entities served by PREL. As part of the process, a literature review of teacher risk factors was performed and published (Hammond & Onikama, 1997). This review concluded that:

1) Factors associated with teacher absenteeism–such as child care, transportation difficulties, illness, and cultural demands–tend to be immediate obligations or concerns (Scott & Wimbush, 1991).

2) Factors associated with attrition–such as low salaries, poor benefits, and work overload–are chronic or habitual concerns (Wari, 1993).

3) Factors associated with stress/burnout–such as student misbehavior (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Pelletier, 1977; American Psychiatric Association, 1994); anger, anxiety, or depression (DeRobbio & Iwanicki, 1996); and school reform (Farber & Ascher, 1992)–are daily nuisances.

These risk factors might also play a role in teacher and school administrator absenteeism, attrition, and stress/burnout in the Pacific region with its unique educational, cultural, and geographical contexts. Pacific schools have adopted the American system of education. However, this transplanted system exists parallel to a Pacific orientation and heritage influenced by Polynesian and Micronesian traditional values, cultural events, and environmental circumstances. Some examples include the following, which were taken from a review of the literature and interviews with Pacific educators:

Cultural events. In some island communities, traditional feasts and funerals are important parts of village life. For instance, if a feast falls on a school day, it is likely that the teacher (who may hold a traditional title) will not go to school, but will prepare for the event. Family relationships with their attendant obligations are highly valued and honored among Pacific Islanders and may account for higher absenteeism rates among Pacific educators.

Family and village social roles. In many island communities, family and village relationships provide a social context that may overlook frequent absenteeism. For example, a teacher may be a member of a large and influential family, many of whom may be employed in the public school system. That teacher's absenteeism may, therefore, be overlooked. Although the traditional American ethic views such favoritism as inappropriate, it may be tolerated within the context of many Pacific lifestyles.

Culturally sanctioned time off. Culturally sanctioned time off may be granted to some people in some entities. For example, a condition referred to as "Monday sickness," occurs when male teachers, especially those who are young and single, are absent from school after a weekend of excess. Their absence is tolerated as a social and developmental pattern related to their youth.

Environmental factors. Unique weather patterns such as hurricanes and "super-typhoons" in the Pacific region may have an effect on absenteeism. Typhoon Paka, for example, recently decimated Guam, leaving it without electricity and forcing the closure of schools. In Hawai'i, giant winter swells may close roadways and limit access to schools. Flooding in low-lying islands and atolls can cause many teachers to miss school for one or more days.

The main purpose of this study was to raise awareness of risk factors affecting educators in the Pacific entities and to provide insight necessary to address the concerns of students, policy makers, and educators throughout the region. Hopefully, the results will stimulate interest and follow-up action as it relates to local professional development opportunities for Pacific educators.

Because of the region's remote geographical location and its distance from educator training programs, as well as the high costs associated with traveling to institutions of higher education, local departments of education must share responsibility for the development of programs or interventions geared towards maintaining the educational work force. Preventing the negative outcomes associated with risk factors can help educators to become more effective while working with their students and thus promote positive student outcomes. The study will also contribute to the fund of knowledge on absenteeism, attrition, and stress/burnout among educators generally, and Pacific educators specifically, thereby contributing to cross-cultural theory building. This, in turn, may assist the development of models and tools for promoting retention and reducing attrition and stress/burnout among educators in the Pacific and elsewhere.

II. Methods

The *Retention and Attrition of Pacific School Teachers and Administrators* (RAPSTA) study was conducted in ten American-affiliated Pacific entities during the spring of 1997. It was designed and conducted by PREL's R&D Cadre and its members' local support teams. PREL staff provided technical assistance.

R&D Cadre members participated in three PREL-sponsored seminars in which they designed the study, developed data collection instruments, and analyzed the data. Cadre members then shared the collected information with their local R&D support teams.

Subjects

The unit of analysis for the RAPSTA study is the elementary and secondary-level teacher and school administrator. In Pohnpei State, the survey included 179 teachers and 30 school administrators from nine public elementary schools and one public high school selected to represent the school system. All surveys were completed and returned, yielding a 100 percent response rate. Tables 1 and 2 summarize demographic characteristics of the subjects.

Table 1

Characteristics of RAPSTA Teacher Sample from Pohnpei State

Demographic Characteristics		Number	Percentage*
Gender	Female	54	30.2
	Male	111	62.0
	No Response	14	7.8
	TOTAL	**179**	**100.0**
Ethnicity	Australian	1	0.6
	Chuukese	10	5.6
	Filipino	14	7.8
	Kapingamarangian	6	3.4
	Mixed Micronesian	21	11.7
	Mokilloan	8	4.5
	Mortlockese	2	1.1
	Nukuoran	3	1.7
	Pingelapese	11	6.1
	Pohnpeian	82	46.0
	Others	2	1.1
	No Response	19	10.6
	TOTAL	**179**	**100.0**
Age	20-29	30	16.8
	30-39	52	29.1
	40-49	54	30.2
	50+	35	19.6
	No Response	8	4.5
	TOTAL	**179**	**100.0**
Marital Status	Never Married	20	11.2
	Married	144	80.4
	Separated	3	1.7
	Divorced	2	1.1
	No Response	10	5.6
	TOTAL	**179**	**100.0**
Education	HS Graduate	18	10.1
	Associate Degree	66	36.9
	Bachelor's Degree	78	43.6
	Master's Degree	1	0.6
	Others	8	4.5
	No Response	8	4.5
	TOTAL	**179**	**100.0**
Experience	1 - 4 Years	23	12.8
	5 - 10 Years	37	20.7
	11 - 14 Years	27	15.1
	15 - 20 Years	34	19.0
	20+ Years	37	20.7
	No Response	21	11.7
	TOTAL	**179**	**100.0**
Salary	< 4,000	13	7.3
	4,000 - 4,999	5	2.8
	6,000 - 6,999	4	2.2
	7,000 - 7,999	6	3.4
	8,000 +	121	67.6
	No Response	30	16.8
	TOTAL	**179**	**100.0**

*Percentages might not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

The majority of teachers are married Pohnpeian males, between the ages of 30 and 49 years, with either an associate (36.9%) or bachelor's (43.6%) degree.

Table 2

Characteristics of RAPSTA School Administrator Sample from Pohnpei State

Demographic Characteristics		Number	Percentage*
Gender	Female	2	6.7
	Male	27	90.0
	No Response	1	3.3
	TOTAL	**30**	**100.0**
Ethnicity	Kapingamarangian	1	3.3
	Pingelapese	1	3.3
	Nukuoran	2	6.7
	Pohnpeian	20	66.7
	Mixed Micronesian	3	10.0
	Other	1	3.3
	No Response	2	6.7
	TOTAL	**30**	**100.0**
Age	35-39	2	6.7
	40-44	4	13.3
	45-49	6	20.0
	50+	18	60.0
	No Response	0	0.0
	TOTAL	**30**	**100.0**
Marital Status	Never Married	3	10.0
	Married	17	56.7
	Separated	8	26.7
	Widowed	1	3.3
	No Response	1	3.3
	TOTAL	**30**	**100.0**
Education	HS Graduate	0	0.0
	Associate Degree	12	40.0
	Bachelor's Degree	15	50.0
	Master's Degree	1	3.3
	No Response	2	6.7
	TOTAL	**30**	**100.0**
Experience	1 - 4 Years	2	6.7
	5 - 10 Years	1	3.3
	11 - 14 Years	2	6.7
	15 - 20 Years	4	13.3
	20+ Years	18	60.0
	No Response	3	10.0
	TOTAL	**30**	**100.0**
Salary	< 10,000	2	6.7
	10,000 - 14,999	7	23.3
	15,000 - 19,999	19	63.3
	20,000+	1	3.3
	No Response	1	3.3
	TOTAL	**30**	**100.0**

*Percentages might not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

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Most school administrators are married Pohnpeian males, over 50 years of age, with a bachelor's degree (50.0%) and more than 20 years of experience.

Sampling

In order to ensure a high rate of response, the R&D Cadre surveyed all teachers and school administrators from representatively sampled schools. This process is referred to as *cluster sampling*, because clusters are chosen to represent the population. In selecting representative schools from Pohnpei State, four variables were considered: 1) ethnolinguistic diversity; 2) local municipalities; 3) school size and level; and 4) degree of school remoteness. Based on these criteria, 10 of the 34 schools in Pohnpei State were selected to represent the school system–seven schools on the main island of Pohnpei and three schools on the outer islands.

All the teachers and principals/vice principals in those ten schools were included in the sample. School principals and vice principals of non-targeted schools on the main island of Pohnpei were also included in the study in order to increase the sample size.

Instrumentation

Two similar data collection instruments were developed, one for teachers and another for school administrators (see Appendices). Each is a five-page survey with three sections: Section 1 consists of 2-1/2 pages of forced-choice and short-answer, self-reported background information as well as absenteeism data for the school year in which the survey was administered. Section 2 is a single-page rating sheet outlining stress/burnout feelings; it was adapted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey and Human Services Survey (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Section 3 is also a single-page rating sheet detailing reasons why an educator might quit teaching or working as a school administrator. Individuals did not identify themselves by name, and all responses were kept confidential.

Section 1 - Demographic Characteristics and Absenteeism Data

Section 1 gathered relevant personal information to be used in examining teacher/school administrator retention and attrition. Questions asked about gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, educational attainment, salary, experience, and current teaching load. Additional data on the number of instructional days away from school during the 1996-1997 school year (SY) and the reasons for those absences were collected. For example, participants were asked to write down the number of days they were away from school in SY 1996-1997 for reasons such as funerals, birthdays, storms, heavy rains, or floods.

Section 2 - Stress and Burnout Ratings

The purpose of Section 2, as a means of measuring employee stress/burnout, was to discover how respondents view their jobs and the people with whom they work closely. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is recognized as the leading measure of burnout. "It is the best known and most widely used questionnaire for the assessment of individual occupational burnout among human service workers and others whose work involves intense interaction with people" (Offerman, 1986, p. 419). The MBI is a 22-item, self-report inventory of three subscales, which were developed to measure dimensions that the authors felt best defined burnout. These subscales include Low Personal Accomplishment (8 items), Emotional Exhaustion (9 items), and Depersonalization (5 items).

- Low Personal Accomplishment results when teachers evaluate themselves negatively, particularly in relation to their work with students (DeRobbio, 1995). Those who report low personal accomplishment may disagree with the statement, "I have accomplished many worthwhile things in teaching" (Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1986, p. 2).

- Emotional Exhaustion "is the tired and fatigued feeling that develops as emotional

energies are drained. When these feelings become chronic, educators find they can no longer give of themselves to students as they once could" (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996, p. 28). They may agree with the statement, "I feel I'm working too hard on my job" (Maslach & Jackson, 1986, p. 2).

- Depersonalization results when educators "no longer have positive feelings about their students" (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996, p. 28). They may develop negative or cynical attitudes and feelings about them and may agree with the statement, "I don't really care what happens to some of my students" (Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1986, p. 2).

Respondents rated each of the 22 items in terms of the frequency that these feelings occur, ranging from "never" (0) to "every day" (6).

To make the survey instrument more appropriate to the Pacific region, the MBI Educators Survey (Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1986) and the MBI Human Services Survey (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) were adapted, with permission from the publisher. Seven of the 22 items were modified to clarify vocabulary and idiomatic phrases. Since many of the respondents in the Pacific entities speak English as a second or foreign language, words such as "exhilarated" and "callous," or expressions such as "at the end of my rope" were stated in more understandable terms. These modifications were made by two Pacific-entity educators who are familiar with the English proficiency of teachers in the region. It was determined that these language-clarifying changes would not significantly alter the instrument's technical qualities. The MBI has been validated for use in countries around the world in a number of translations (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996, p. 1).

Section 3 - Reasons for Leaving the Profession

The purpose of Section 3 was to understand why teachers and school administrators leave their jobs. Respondents were asked to rate each of 19 statements on a four-point Likert-type scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." For example, teachers rated their level of agreement with two statements: "I might leave my current teaching job for a better teaching position within the next two years" and "I might leave teaching altogether within the next two years." They were also asked to rate their agreement by noting reasons why they might quit teaching. Reasons for leaving the profession, as listed on the survey, were selected because of their prevalence in attrition literature. Additional reasons were included on the basis of their perceived importance by educators in the Pacific region.

Procedures

The R&D Cadre members and their local support teams coordinated the survey administration. They planned meetings to inform school staff about the RAPSTA study, its purpose, rationale for the selection of schools, and the importance of serious responses to the survey. In these meetings, schedules for data collection were developed and confirmed. Plans for necessary logistical support and accommodations were also communicated to the staff.

An important part of the procedures was the administration of the survey. In Pohnpei State, a special meeting for school administrators on the main island was called at the DOE Central Office. An R&D cadre member, the local support team, and a PREL staff member distributed the survey instrument. Directions were given primarily in Pohnpeian, and the completed forms were collected at the end of the session. The cadre member and the local support team then established a school visitation schedule. Outer island school administrators did not attend this meeting; however, they were surveyed by the local support team on each island.

In order to conduct the teacher survey, the local support team visited the selected schools, administered the survey during one session at each school, and collected the completed surveys. Instructions were given in Pohnpeian.

The data were collected from April 1997 to June 1997, giving adequate time for personnel to complete the surveys, and for PREL representatives to monitor the status of returned surveys. Surveys were collected by the local support team after being completed by each school's teachers and administrators. They were then forwarded to PREL in Honolulu for data entry and preliminary analysis.

III. Findings

This section of the report features general findings on absenteeism, attrition, and stress/burnout among teachers and school administrators in Pohnpei State. It highlights findings in three areas: (1) reasons for school absences, (2) possible reasons for attrition in the education profession, and (3) comparisons of Potential Leavers and Non-Leavers.

Reasons for School Absences

During the 1996-1997 school year, teachers in Pohnpei State were away from work, on average, a total of 11.98 days. School administrators were away from work, on average, a total of 19.15 days. Table 3 provides data on reasons why teachers were away from work and frequency of absence. Table 4 provides data on reasons why school administrators were away from work and frequency of absence.

Table 3
Reasons Why Teachers Are Away from School in Pohnpei State

Rank	Reason	Average # of Days Away
1	Personal illness	3.48
2	Vacation	1.95
3	Funerals	1.49
4	Transportation problem	0.67
5	Administrative leave	0.57
6	Meetings and workshops	0.54
7	Child care	0.51
8	Family member sick	0.44
9	Storm, heavy rain, flood, etc.	0.36
10	Maternity leave	0.30
11	Church activities	0.28
12	Family responsibilities	0.23
13	Stress	0.22
14	Educational leave	0.17
15	Community responsibilities	0.15
16	Working conditions	0.12
17	Other	0.11
18	Training leave	0.07
19	Relationship with supervisors	0.06
19	Military training	0.06
20	Birthdays	0.05
20	Lack of instructional materials	0.05
21	Relationship with co-workers	0.04
22	Jury duty	0.03
22	Paternity leave	0.03
23	Suspension	0.00
23	Weddings	0.00
	TOTAL	**11.98**

In Pohnpei State, personal illness was the leading cause of teachers being away from school, with an average of 3.48 days away. The next highest reason was vacation, with an average of 1.95 days; followed by funerals, with an average of 1.49 days; and transportation problems, with an average of .67 days.

Table 4

Reasons Why School Administrators Are Away from School in Pohnpei State

Rank	Reason	Average # of Days Away
1	Vacation	4.63
2	Meetings and workshops	4.33
3	Funerals	2.70
3	Personal illness	2.70
4	Family member sick	1.40
5	Church activities	0.60
6	Community responsibilities	0.40
6	Training leave	0.40
7	Family responsibilities	0.33
8	Administrative leave	0.30
9	Child care	0.23
10	Stress	0.20
11	Other	0.17
12	Maternity leave	0.13
12	Storm, heavy rain, flood, etc.	0.13
13	Lack of instructional materials	0.10
13	Relationship with co-workers	0.10
14	Birthdays	0.07
14	Relationship with supervisors	0.07
14	Transportation problem	0.07
15	Educational leave	0.03
15	Paternity leave	0.03
15	Working conditions	0.03
16	Jury duty	0.00
16	Military training	0.00
16	Suspension	0.00
16	Weddings	0.00
	TOTAL	19.15

In Pohnpei State, school administrators were most frequently away from school due to vacation, averaging 4.63 days. This was followed by meetings and workshops, with an average of 4.33 days. In a tie for third, funerals and personal illness averaged 2.70 days each.

Reasons for Attrition in the Education Profession

Respondents rated 17 reasons for leaving teaching or administration on a four-point Likert-type scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." In order to judge the technical significance of correlations between responses on each item, this ordinal scale was collapsed into two categories: "strongly disagree" and "disagree" were counted as DISAGREE; "strongly agree" and "agree" were counted as AGREE. Percentage of agreement was then calculated for each reason.

In Pohnpei State, 30.73 percent (N=55) of the surveyed teachers agreed that they might leave teaching within the next two years. For purposes of analysis, two categories were created: Potential Leavers and Non-Leavers. Non-Leavers are those who disagreed with the statement, "I might leave teaching within the next two years." Table 5 ranks the reasons teachers gave for leaving teaching, comparing Potential Leavers with Non-Leavers.

For both Potential Leavers and Non-Leavers, the number one reason for leaving teaching was low salaries. Also included in the top five by both groups were poor working conditions, no support from school administration, and no support from central office.

Table 5

Reasons for Leaving Teaching in Pohnpei State

If I quit teaching, it would be because of ...		Potential Leavers		Non-Leavers	
		% Agree	Rank	% Agree	Rank
poor working conditions		73.6	5	61.5	5
no support from school administration		83.0	3	68.3	4
no support from central office		80.4	4	69.1	3
too much stress		60.4	7	53.8	7
poor relationship with parents		46.3	11	37.5	11
students' bad attitudes	**	46.3	11	18.0	17
my lack of control over school policies		33.3	15	26.6	15
poor benefits	*	70.4	6	48.8	10
personal health problems	*	34.6	14	54.4	6
too many disagreements about how to teach		43.6	12	35.0	13
not enough school materials and supplies	**	83.3	2	52.5	8
low salaries	*	90.9	1	76.5	1
too many responsibilities	**	58.5	8	30.0	14
pressure from the community		37.0	13	36.4	12
retirement	*	53.7	9	72.8	2
promotion		47.3	10	51.9	9
poor relationship with other teachers		24.1	16	20.3	16

* $p \leq .05$

** $p \leq .01$

For each possible reason for leaving teaching, a statistical test (Chi^2) was performed to find out if the response patterns of Potential Leavers and Non-Leavers are different. Potential Leavers are more likely to leave for the following reasons: students' bad attitudes, poor benefits, not enough school materials and supplies, low salaries, and too many responsibilities. They are less likely than Non-Leavers to leave for reasons related to personal health problems and retirement.

In Pohnpei State, 20 percent (N=6) of the surveyed school administrators agreed that they might leave educational administration within the next two years. Table 6 ranks the reasons school administrators gave for leaving the school administration field, and compares Potential Leavers with Non-Leavers. Non-Leavers are those who disagreed with the statement, "I might leave educational administration altogether within the next two years."

There are many reasons why Potential Leavers might leave school administration (see rankings in Table 6). For each possible reason for leaving school administration, a statistical test (Chi^2) was performed to determine if response patterns of Potential Leavers and Non-Leavers are different. The results indicated that school administrators were more likely to leave because of low salaries.

Comparison of Potential Leavers and Non-Leavers

The relationship between stress, burnout, and reported desire to leave education was examined in order to provide assistance to program managers and staff developers who work to improve school climate.

1. *A high degree of burnout* is reflected in high scores on the Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization subscales, and in low scores on the Personal Accomplishment subscale.

2. A *medium degree of burnout* is reflected in moderate scores on the three subscales.

3. A *low degree of burnout* is reflected in low scores on the Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization subscales, and in high scores on the Personal Accomplishment subscale.

Table 6
Reasons for Leaving Administration in Pohnpei State

If I quit being a school administrator, it would be because of ...	Potential Leavers		Non-Leavers	
	% Agree	Rank	% Agree	Rank
poor working conditions	66.7	3	63.2	5
no support from school staff	50.0	5	66.7	3
no support from central office administration	83.3	2	76.2	2
too much stress	66.7	3	76.2	2
poor relationships with parents	50.0	5	42.9	11
students' bad attitudes	16.7	7	19.0	15
my lack of control over school policies	50.0	5	23.8	14
poor benefits	60.0	4	61.9	6
personal health problems	50.0	5	65.0	4
too many disagreements about how to run my school	33.3	6	57.1	7
not enough school materials and supplies	66.7	3	38.1	12
low salaries *	100.0	1	50.0	10
too many responsibilities	66.7	3	55.0	8
pressure from the community	33.3	6	52.4	9
retirement	50.0	5	80.0	1
promotion	33.3	6	65.0	4
poor relationship with teachers	33.3	6	35.0	13
poor relationship with staff	33.3	6	35.0	13
political reasons	16.7	7	50.0	10

* $p \leq .05$
** $p \leq .01$

Table 7 reflects a comparison of scores from the norm sample with mean scores for all Pohnpeian teacher and school administrator respondents. Teachers in Pohnpei State express a higher sense of personal accomplishment than both school administrators and the norm sample. In addition, they are neither as emotionally exhausted nor as depersonalized as the norm group. On the contrary, they report a higher degree of engagement with work than educators included in the norm sample.

School administrators, on the other hand, experience a lower sense of personal accomplishment compared to both Pohnpei's teachers and the norm sample. However, like the teachers in this sample, they are less emotionally exhausted, and have a lower sense of depersonalization than the norm group. Occupational burnout does not appear to be a problem for most teachers or school administrators in Pohnpei State.

Table 7

MBI Subscale Scores for Pohnpei State Teachers and School Administrators Compared to the Norm Sample

MBI Subscale	Sample Size*	Mean Score
Personal Accomplishment (PA)		
Pohnpei State Teachers	179	35.3
Pohnpei State School Administrators	28	30.8
Norm Sample	4,163	33.5
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)		
Pohnpei State Teachers	179	19.3
Pohnpei State School Administrators	27	18.1
Norm Sample	4,163	21.3
Depersonalization (DP)		
Pohnpei State Teachers	179	7.0
Pohnpei State School Administrators	27	8.1
Norm Sample	4,163	11.0

*Sample sizes vary due to non-responses.

In order to analyze how Potential Leavers compare to Non-Leavers on the MBI subscales, scores were classified as High, Moderate, or Low. To make interpretation easier, the suggested cut-off scores used by MBI authors to classify low and high Personal Accomplishment were reversed. That is, a high score in this report means a high sense of personal accomplishment. According to the authors (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996), personal accomplishment is a reverse scale, which means high scores denote a high lack of personal accomplishment. We found this to be confusing and, thus, made these changes for our reporting purposes. The following cut-off scores were used:

Table 8

Cut-off Scores for MBI Subscale Categories

MBI Subscale	High	Moderate	Low
Personal Accomplishment	≥ 37	31-36	≤ 30
Emotional Exhaustion	≥ 27	17-26	≤ 16
Depersonalization	≥ 14	9-13	≤ 8

Figures 1-6 display differences between Potential Leavers and Non-Leavers among teachers (Figures 1-3) and school administrators (Figures 4-6) on the three MBI subscales. For both teachers and school administrators, the patterns are the same. Those who may leave are less likely to feel a high sense of personal accomplishment, are more emotionally exhausted, and feel more depersonalized than those who plan to stay. Both teachers and school administrators who plan to leave appear to experience more occupational burnout than their non-leaving peers.

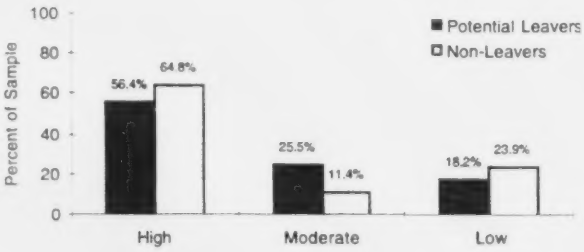

Figure 1. **Personal accomplishment among teachers in Pohnpei State**

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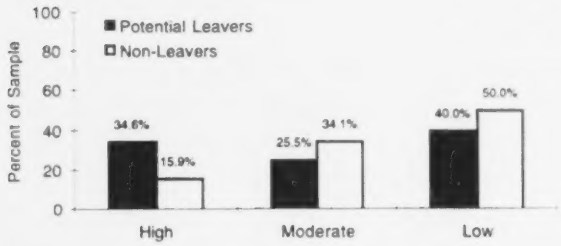

Figure 2. **Emotional exhaustion among teachers in Pohnpei State**

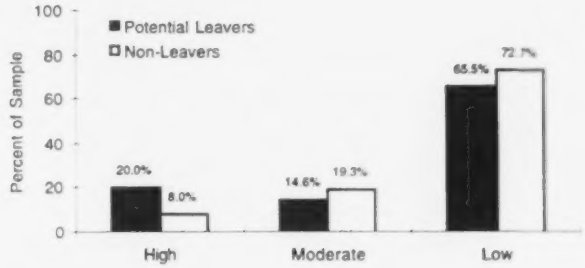

Figure 3. **Depersonalization among teachers in Pohnpei State**

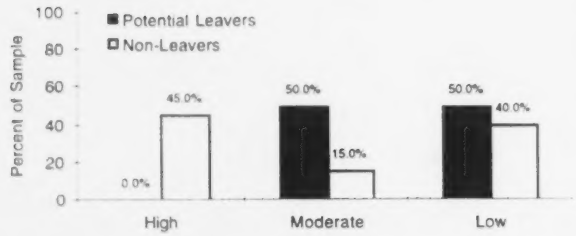

Figure 4. **Personal accomplishment among school administrators in Pohnpei State**

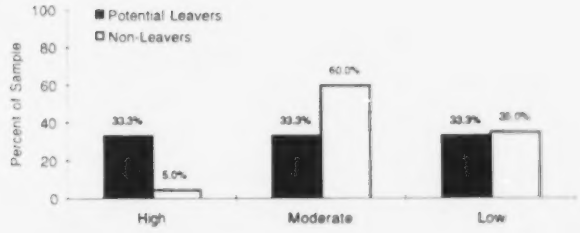

Figure 5. **Emotional exhaustion among school administrators in Pohnpei State**

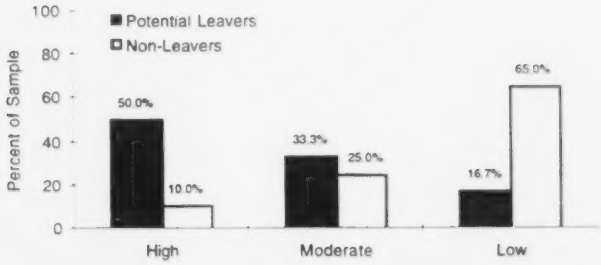

Figure 6. **Depersonalization among school administrators in Pohnpei State**

IV. Discussion

Absenteeism

It appears that absenteeism among teachers and school administrators in Pohnpei State is a problem. The average numbers of absences for teachers (11.98) and school administrators (19.15) are among the highest in the region.

Personal illness, vacations, and funerals were cited as the leading causes for teachers to be away from school. Immediate obligations or concerns, such as illness and funerals, are cited in the research literature as reasons for absenteeism (Scott & Wimbush, 1991), but the high number of days away

due to vacation is of some concern. Why are teachers taking vacation during the school year?

The top reasons for school administrators to be away from school are vacation, meetings and workshops, funerals, and personal illness. Vacation was cited as the number one reason, with an average of 4.63 days away. This causes some concern. A careful review of the raw data showed that two respondents marked two months (40+ days) away from school for vacation. Personnel and fiscal policies in Pohnpei State require that teachers and school administrators take leave for two months during the summer. These respondents were probably referring to this break when they filled out the survey. As a result, the data might be skewed. Re-analysis of school administrator data that excludes these two respondents results in an average of 1.30 days away due to vacation.

Attrition

More than 30 percent of surveyed Pohnpei teachers reported that they might leave their profession within two years. This is the highest attrition rate across all entities in the region. Low salaries and lack of administrative support are concerns of all teachers, but those who say they might leave cite the following additional reasons: students' bad attitudes, poor benefits, not enough school materials and supplies, and too many responsibilities.

Problems associated with student behavior and classroom management are frequent concerns in Pohnpei State. Teachers' perceptions of poor student attitudes and disruptive behavior can generate frustration and negative attitudes towards these students, creating a cycle of negative interaction. This, along with lack of funding for education, could cause teachers to look elsewhere for employment.

Twenty percent of school administrators surveyed reported that they might leave their profession within two years. Many reasons for leaving were cited, but Potential Leavers are more likely to leave due to low salaries. With diminished funds for education as a result of the Compact of Free Association step-down, many school administrators might feel that they are more likely to find higher-paying jobs in another field.

Burnout

Teachers in Pohnpei State, in general, experience less burnout than their U.S. Mainland counterparts. They exhibit a higher sense of personal accomplishment than both school administrators and the norm sample. In addition, they have low levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. School administrators, in general, experience a lower sense of personal accomplishment than teachers. Perhaps teachers see evidence of student progress on a regular basis and therefore feel more effective. School administrators, on the other hand, are more distanced from direct instruction and are less able to see progress as readily. As a result, they might not have a strong feeling of success.

Teachers and school administrators who plan to leave within the next two years experience more burnout than those who plan to stay. These Potential Leavers experience a lower sense of personal accomplishment, are more emotionally exhausted, and feel depersonalized. They appear to experience all aspects of burnout. The extremely high attrition rate among Pohnpei's teachers might be related to this occupational burnout.

V. Limitations

The Challenge of Language and Culture

Conducting research across diverse linguistic and cultural groups is a challenging task. The language in which research is conducted can limit accurate interpretation of its results. Expectations regarding task importance and response candor may vary from culture to culture. Thus, results from cross-cultural studies may be difficult to interpret.

While English is the language of wider communication in all of the American-affiliated Pacific entities, respondents to the surveys in this study varied in their use and comprehension of English. For some, English might be a first language; for others, it might be a second or third language, used to a much lesser extent than the vernacular. Thus, particular vocabulary, grammatical structures, or instructions may have been problematic.

To adjust for some for these potential errors in measurement, native language/culture informants, who are members of the R&D Cadre or entity local support teams, provided the following expert assistance:

- developed and piloted questions used in the survey;
- revised potentially confusing items from the Maslach instrument;
- in many cases, administered surveys in group settings, leading respondents through each item and clarifying meanings upon request; and
- provided translations, where necessary, especially in geographically isolated outer-island settings.

Culture-specific interpretations concerning the importance of research, ways of responding, and the meanings of specific terms might all affect results. R&D Cadre members made special efforts to work with their respective departments or ministries of education and directors to ensure that teachers and school administrators took their responses to the survey seriously. In many cases, entity-wide meetings were held to explain the study, its importance, and the need for truthful data. Because the study was designed by members of each department of education, and was intended to investigate issues of importance to the entity, some support was ensured. The study was discussed at principals' and teachers' meetings; support for administration and data collection was provided by the entity department or ministry of education.

Instrumentation

All data collected in this study came from self-report questionnaires. This method of data collection was selected because of its perceived advantages for large-scale research. Those advantages include:

- Questionnaires are relatively easy and inexpensive to administer
- Questionnaires can be designed to ensure anonymity
- Respondents answer at their own pace
- Questions are standardized

However, self-report questionnaires also have limitations—responses may not always be truthful or accurate. Some respondents might make careless errors, such as checking the wrong box or writing the incorrect number. They might purposely answer questions with incorrect information because they want to give a favorable impression or avoid potentially embarrassing admissions. Or, they might misinterpret questions and respond inaccurately.

The R&D Cadre pilot-tested the questionnaires in order to improve wording so that respondents might better interpret the meanings of questions. Additionally, directions for completing the questionnaires and administration procedures were purposefully designed to ensure anonymity. However, even with these precautions, hindsight tells us that specific changes might have improved the validity of

responses. In particular, the following limitations are noted:

1. Items that required respondents to check boxes on the right were somewhat confusing. The items should have been transposed so that the boxes were on the left.

2. Questions measuring attrition could have been phrased with greater clarity. Rather than asking if the respondents might leave and reasons that *might* cause them to leave, perhaps asking whether or not they were going to leave and *why* would have provided more definitive information.

3. Survey directions could have clearly told respondents to exclude official school vacations from responses to questions regarding the number of days away.

4. In order to assure respondents of anonymity and foster truthfulness in responses, surveys did not ask for individuals' names. However, they did request the names of schools. In entities where there are few schools and a limited number of teachers (e.g., one per grade level), this may not have been sufficient to guarantee anonymity, and, consequently, honesty in response.

Analysis

Non-responses to items on the questionnaires could limit the validity of some results. For example, in order to analyze differences between teachers who are Potential Leavers and Non-Leavers, only those who responded to the question "I might leave teaching within the next two years" and each of the reasons for leaving could be included in the analyses (cross-tabulations). In some instances, large portions of the sample did not respond to either the "I might leave" question or one of the reasons.

Therefore, conclusions based on such results may only be generalized on the basis of those who were willing to respond. There may be systematic differences between respondents and non-respondents. For example, if non-respondents were more likely to experience depersonalization at work and, therefore, did not care to respond to all items, then conclusions based on results in which they did not participate would under-identify this risk factor in the population.

Although standardized group administration practices included requests to respond to all items, these requests were not sufficient. Moreover, standardized administration was not always possible.

Non-responses on the Maslach Burnout Inventory were also a problem. In order to calculate each subscale score, all items that contributed to that subscale must have been answered. If a respondent left one item out, the subscale in which that item was included could not be computed. Therefore, the extent of burnout may be underrepresented.

VI. Recommendations

The recommendations provided in this section of the report are based on general findings concerned with absenteeism, attrition, and stress/burnout among teachers and school administrators in Pohnpei State. Findings in three areas are highlighted: (1) reasons for absences, (2) possible reasons for attrition in the education profession, and (3) comparison of Potential Leavers and Non-Leavers.

Recommendations Regarding Findings on Absenteeism

Absenteeism among teachers and school administrators in Pohnpei State appears to be a problem. Teachers were away from work for an average of

11.98 days. School administrators were away from work for an average of 19.15 days. These absenteeism rates are among the highest in the region. Although the reasons stated–personal illness, vacations, and meetings and workshops–might be valid, the very high rates of absenteeism for both teachers and school administrators are problematic. It is therefore recommended that improving the attendance of educators in Pohnpei State be given serious consideration. Existing policies on attendance should be reviewed for appropriate action. In the absence of existing attendance policies, written policies should be developed, consistently implemented, and enforced through an appropriate accountability system that includes sanctions and rewards. For children to make academic progress, they need the guidance and leadership of their teachers and school administrators; these educators provide necessary and important instruction and also serve as role models.

Recommendations Regarding Findings on Attrition

More than 30 percent of Pohnpei State's surveyed teachers might leave their profession within two years. This is the highest attrition rate across all entities in the region. The top reasons for leaving include students' bad attitudes, poor benefits, not enough school materials and supplies, and too many responsibilities. To contribute to staff stability, a proactive program that will reduce the attrition rate of teachers and school administrators should be designed and implemented by the public school system. Staff stability, in turn, could contribute to better student performance and achievement.

Recommendations Regarding Findings on Stress/Burnout

Although burnout is not a problem for teachers and school administrators who choose to remain in education, those teachers and school administrators who may leave within the next two years experience a lower sense of personal accomplishment, are more emotionally exhausted, and feel more depersonalized. For those who plan to leave, occupational burnout appears to be a problem. It is therefore recommended that, in order to retain these educators, the public school system develop a comprehensive program to reduce stress and burnout. This might improve the attendance and well being of those professionals who work most closely with students.

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Appendices

Appendix A: RAPSTA Teacher Questionnaire

Appendix B: RAPSTA School Administrator Questionnaire

Appendix A

Retention and Attrition of
Pacific School Teachers and Administrators
(RAPSTA) Study

Teacher Questionnaire

Created by the

Research and Development Cadre

American Samoa Department of Education
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System
Federated States of Micronesia National Department of Education
Guam Department of Education
Chuuk State Department of Education
Hawai'i State Department of Education
Kosrae State Department of Education
Pohnpei State Department of Education
Yap State Department of Education
Republic of the Marshall Islands Ministry of Education
Republic of Palau Ministry of Education
with the assistance of
Pacific Resources for Education and Learning

PREL

Retention and Attrition of Pacific School Teachers and Administrators (RAPSTA) Study
Teacher Questionnaire

SECTION 1

The purpose of this section is to understand what factors cause teachers to be away from school. All responses will be kept anonymous. Please complete this section by filling in the requested information. Please print your responses and check (✓) boxes () as appropriate. Remember, DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. It is important that all responses be anonymous.

School: _____ **Date:** _____

Location: Am. Samoa Guam CNMI Hawai'i RMI
Pohnpei Chuuk Kosrae Yap Palau

Gender: M F **Place of birth:** _____
(Entity or State or Country)

Ethnic heritage: _____
(Ethnicity of Parents)

Age:
15-19 20-24 25-29 30-34 35-39 40-44
45-49 50-54 55-59 60-64 65 +

Current marital status:
Never Married Married Separated Divorced Widowed

Highest level of education attained:
High School Graduate Associate Degree Bachelor Degree
Master Degree Other (specify)

Major field of study: _____
(Examples: Elementary Education, Math, Science, Agriculture, etc.)

Current annual salary: $_____(per year)

Years of teaching experience:
1 - 4 5 - 10 11 - 14 15 - 20 21 or more

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
What grades do you currently teach? (check all that apply)													
How many students do you teach? (put in number per grade level)													

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For elementary teachers who teach in self-contained settings, please check the subject areas you are currently teaching.

✓	**Subject areas you teach (put a ✓ in column on left)**	✓	**Subject areas you teach (put a ✓ in column on left)**
	Language Arts/English		Art
	Language Arts/Vernacular		Music
	Math		Health
	Science		Physical Education
	Social Studies		Guidance
	Other (specify)		Other (specify)

For secondary teachers who teach in departmentalized settings, please check the subject area(s) and number of class periods you are currently teaching.

	Number of class periods you teach (put a ✓ in the appropriate columns)						
Subject area(s) you teach	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Language Arts/English							
Language Arts/Vernacular							
Math							
Science							
Social Studies							
Vocational Education (specify)							
Business Education							
Computers							
Art							
Music							
Physical Education							
Other (specify)							

If you have had jobs other than teaching, please list them below.

Previous employment other than teaching	Number of years

Total number of instructional days you were away from school this year (SY '96 -'97):

None 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 20 +

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Write the number of days you were away from school in SY '96 -'97 for the reasons listed below.

Reason	Number of Days	Reason	Number of Days
funerals		working conditions	
birthdays		relationship with co-workers	
child care		stress	
transportation problem		meetings and workshops	
personal illness		administrative leave	
family member sick		educational leave	
family responsibilities (errands)		training leave	
community responsibilities		church activities	
storm, heavy rain or flood		maternity leave	
vacation		paternity leave	
lack of instructional materials		suspension	
relationship with supervisor		jury duty	
wedding		military training	
other (specify)		other (specify)	

SECTION 2

This section of the questionnaire contained directions and 22 items intended to measure teachers' stress and burnout. This section was modified and reproduced by special permission of the Publisher, Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, CA 94303 from ***Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey*** *by Christina Maslach, Susan E. Jackson, & Richard L. Schwab. Copyright 1986 by Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc. All rights reserved. Permission for reproduction of the instrument in this report was not granted.*

SECTION 3

The purpose of this section is to understand what makes teachers leave their jobs. Below are listed statements made about quitting a teaching job. Place a check (✓) in the column next to each statement that best reflects how much *you agree or disagree* with the statement. Please respond to all statements.

MAKE ONE ✓ MARK ON EACH LINE.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I might leave my current teaching job for a better teaching position within the next two years.				
I might leave teaching all together within the next two years.				
If I quit teaching, it would be because of . . .				
poor working conditions.				
no support from school administration.				
no support from central office administration.				
too much stress.				
poor relationships with parents.				
students' bad attitudes.				
my lack of control over school policies.				
poor benefits (health insurance, retirement, etc.).				
personal health problems.				
too many disagreements about how to teach.				
not enough school materials and supplies.				
low salaries.				
too many responsibilities.				
pressure from the community.				
retirement.				
promotion.				
poor relationship with other teachers.				

Thank you for your assistance. Please return this questionnaire to the large envelope which has been placed on one of the desks in the room.

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Appendix B

Retention and Attrition of
Pacific School Teachers and Administrators
(RAPSTA) Study

School Administrator Questionnaire

Created by the

Research and Development Cadre

American Samoa Department of Education
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System
Federated States of Micronesia National Department of Education
Guam Department of Education
Chuuk State Department of Education
Hawai'i State Department of Education
Kosrae State Department of Education
Pohnpei State Department of Education
Yap State Department of Education
Republic of the Marshall Islands Ministry of Education
Republic of Palau Ministry of Education
with the assistance of
Pacific Resources for Education and Learning

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Appendix B: RAPSTA School Administrator Questionnaire

Retention and Attrition of Pacific School Teachers and Administrators
(RAPSTA) Study
School Administrator Questionnaire

SECTION 1

The purpose of this section is to understand what factors cause school administrators to be away from school. All responses will be kept anonymous. Please complete this section by filling in the requested information. Please print your responses and check (✓) boxes () as appropriate. Remember, DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THIS QUESTIONAIRE. It is important that all responses be anonymous.

Date: _____

Location: Am. Samoa Guam CNMI Hawai`i RMI
Pohnpei Chuuk Kosrae Yap Palau

Gender: M F **Place of birth:** _____
(Entity or State or Country)

Ethnic heritage: _____
(Ethnicity of Parents)

Age:
15-19 20-24 25-29 30-34 35-39 40-44
45-49 50-54 55-59 60-64 65 +

Current marital status:
Never Married Married Separated Divorced Widowed

Highest level of education attained:
High School Graduate Associate Degree Bachelor Degree
Master Degree Other (specify)

Major field(s) of study: _____
(Examples: School Administration, Curriculum & Instruction, Elementary Education, Math, etc.)

Current annual salary: $_____(per year)

Total school enrollment: _____

Students enrolled by grade:
What is the student enrollment at your school by grade?

K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

Your current position:
principal vice-principal head teacher
teaching principal teaching vice-principal

In the space below, please describe your training in school administration.

Please indicate the number of years of teaching and administrative experience you have had.

	Number of years by level		
	Elem./Int. (K-8)	**High Sch. (9-12)**	**College**
teacher			
head teacher			
teaching department head			
teaching vice-principal			
vice-principal			
teaching principal			
principal			

If you are a teaching principal/teaching vice-principal, please check the subject area(s) and number of class periods you are currently teaching.

	Number of class periods you teach (put a ✓ in the appropriate columns)						
Subject area(s) you teach	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Language Arts/English							
Language Arts/Vernacular							
Math							
Science							
Social Studies							
Vocational Education (specify)							
Business Education							
Computers							
Art							
Music							
Physical Education							
Other (specify)							

If you have had jobs other than teaching and/or school administration, please list them below.

Previous employment other than teaching or school administration	Number of years

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Total number of days you were away from school in SY '96 -'97:

None 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 20 +

Write the number of days you were away from school in SY '96 -'97 for the reasons listed below.

Reason	Number of Days	Reason	Number of Days
funerals		working conditions	
birthdays		relationship with co-workers	
child care		stress	
transportation problem		meetings and workshops	
personal illness		administrative leave	
family member sick		educational leave	
family responsibilities (errands)		training leave	
community responsibilities		church activities	
storm, heavy rain or flood		maternity leave	
vacation		paternity leave	
lack of instructional materials		suspension	
relationship with supervisor		jury duty	
wedding		military training	
other (specify)		other (specify)	

SECTION 2

This section of the questionnaire contained directions and 22 items intended to measure school administrators' stress and burnout. This section was modified and reproduced by special permission of the Publisher, Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, CA 94303 from ***Maslach Burnout Inventory–Human Services Survey*** *by Christina Maslach and Susan E. Jackson. Copyright 1986 by Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc. All rights reserved. Permission for reproduction of the instrument in this report was not granted.*

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SECTION 3

The purpose of this section is to understand what makes school administrators leave their jobs. Below are listed statements made about quitting a school administrator's job. Place a check (✓) in the column next to each statement that best reflects how much *you agree or disagree* with the statement.

MAKE ONE ✓ MARK ON EACH LINE.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I might leave my current school administrator position for a better school administrator position within the next two years.				
I might leave my current school administrator position for a better central office administrator position within the next two years.				
I might leave educational administration all together within the next two years.				
If I quit being a school administrator, it would be because of . . .				
poor working conditions.				
no support from school staff.				
no support from central office administration.				
too much stress.				
poor relationships with parents.				
students' bad attitudes.				
my lack of control over school policies.				
poor benefits (health insurance, retirement, etc.).				
personal health problems.				
too many disagreements about how to run my school.				
not enough school materials and supplies.				
low salaries.				
too many responsibilities.				
pressure from the community.				
retirement.				
promotion.				
poor relationship with teachers.				
poor relationship with staff.				
political reasons.				

Thank you for your assistance. Please return this questionnaire to the large envelope which has been placed on one of the desks in the room.

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